Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association
Update
January 2026

Lars Bjorn Receives SEMJA's Ron Brooks Award

BY PIOTR MICHALOWSKI

Every year, the Southeast Michigan Jazz Association (SEMJA) board presents the Ron Brooks Award to individuals who have made significant contributions to the Detroit jazz community as performers and/or educators. This year, the award, named after the organization's founder, goes to

Lars Bjorn, who has led SEMJA as president for the last two dozen years. The presentation will take place at the Kerrytown Concert House, which has partnered with our organization to celebrate Lars, at 4:00 p.m. on March 1, 2026. A short ceremony will be accompanied by of a full concert by bassist Paul Keller, pianist Adam Mosley, guitarist Ralph Tope, drummer Jesse Kramer, and a few surprise guests.

Lars was born and raised in the Swedish port city of Gävle. His passion for jazz began early, when he heard the wonderful American trumpet player Benny Bailey who had settled in Sweden while touring there with Lionel Hampton's big band. Soon he was attending concerts by touring groups and even playing drums in an amateur group called Trio A Go Go. Scandinavia was a hotbed of jazz at the time, with its own vibrant scene, but also with many US expatriates living there, including Stan Getz, Ben Webster, Dexter Gordon, Kenny Drew, and Art Taylor and was an important destination for touring musicians such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Thelonious Monk, the Chicago Blues All-Stars, and even Sun Ra, all of whom Lars could hear in his home town, during visits to Stockholm, and then once he moved to attend university, in the capital and in Uppsala. Looking back, he observed, "those were wonderful days as I was fortunate to hear all these fabulous musicians as a youngster in my hometown!" Upon graduation, he left for the United States with a fellowship to attend graduate school at the University of North Carolina, where in 1974 he earned his PhD in sociology. He was then appointed as a professor of sociology at the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus, where he worked until his retirement in 2013.

SEMJA AWARD
THE RON BROOKS AWARD

Lars settled in Ann Arbor but much of his research and teaching began to concentrate on the city of Detroit, focusing on labor, class, and race, much of it in association with the auto industry, but also quickly became immersed in its rich musical community. He began to interview and write articles about Motor City musicians and their culture but also became actively involved with the scene, joining the board of the Detroit Jazz Center led by John Sinclair, Herb Boyd and Kenn Cox and later becoming a supporter of the Societie of the Culturally Concerned founded by Barbara and Kenny Cox.

While teaching courses about Detroit and its jazz he quickly realized how little research had been conducted on

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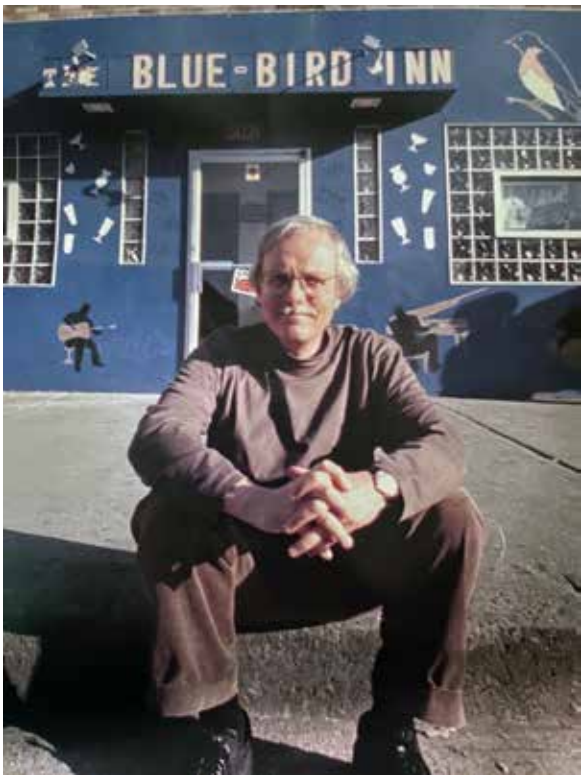
the subject. Together with Detroiter jazz chronicler and DJ Jim Gallert he initiated a longer-term project to investigate and document the often-overlooked rich history of African American music in the city. This involved much archival work, searching out unpublished memoirs and documents, but also seeking out musicians, presenters, and even fans who still remembered days gone by and then recording and transcribing extensive interviews with them. Eventually, all this data was synthesized by Lars and Jim in a pioneering book, *Before Motown: A History of Jazz in Detroit, 1920–60*, published by the University of Michigan Press in 2001. Written with a broader public in mind but academically sound, the work combined portraits of musicians set against the social history of the city and the times, delving into race relations and urban history, including the effects of the destruction of Paradise Valley and Black Bottom, the economics and community settings of the entertainment business, mapping venues, various associated civic organizations, and the importance of communal values. Since then, many others have taken up the topics, often inspired by this unique book, but it retains its importance to this day. Even so, only a small portion of the researched material could be used in the book, but their archives, now deposited at Eastern Michigan University, will provide an unparalleled rich source of data for chroniclers and scholars of Detroit music history for generations to come, as will the interview tapes, which will also be deposited for others to use. Lars and Jim often lectured on the subject of the book and for years they operated the Jazz Talk Tent at the annual Labor Day weekend Detroit Jazz Festival, running interviews and panels with some of the world's top jazz artists, scholars, and journalists. In 2018, the Jazz Journalists Association honored them as Jazz Heroes for the book and for their individual and collective work on behalf of the Detroit jazz community.

In addition to his more formal labors, the love of jazz has permeated Lars's life. He met his future wife Susan Wineberg in August of 1976 at a table at one of the regular free Sunday afternoon jazz sets at the marvelously funky Del Rio bar that operated between 1969 and 2004 at the northeast corner of Ashley and Washington Streets in Ann Arbor, in the space now incorporated into the Grizzly Peak restaurant. The music, often including one of the owners, Rick Burgess, at the piano, featured many of the area's finest jazz musicians, with some, like multi-instrumentalist Sherman Mitchell, coming from as far away as



Flint. When Lars and Susan eventually decided to get married in August 1984, the days-long celebrations, with family and friends from Sweden and elsewhere culminated with a party and reception at the Cobblestone Farm and the wedding band consisted of the Ron Brooks trio with pianist Rick Roe and drummer Pete Sears—the house band of the Bird of Paradise jazz club—with the addition of saxophonist/flutist Paul Vornhagen.

SEMJA was born in the spring of 1987, created at the Bird of Paradise jazz club — led by Ron Brooks — by the bassist together with Don Chisholm and Michael G. Nastos. Soon they were joined by several other individuals, including Lars Bjorn, who became the editor of its monthly UPDATE publication and eventually in 2004 the organization's president, a position he continues to hold today. Over the years he has officiated over the presentation of the Ron Brooks Award, established in 2012 to commemorate the quarter century of SEMJA's existence and to honor its founder. This year he will temporarily step back to be the recipient of the recognition he so richly deserves.

SEMJA presents the Ron Brooks Award to Lars Bjorn

This special concert and presentation will be Sunday, March 1, 2026, 4:00 p.m at Ann Arbor's Kerrytown Concert House. Music by Adam Mosely (piano), Ralph Tope (guitar), Paul Keller (bass) and Jesse Kramer (drums).

Tickets may be purchased at *kerrytownconcerthouse.org*.

Paul Keller's Wizardry

BY IRA LAX

SEMJA Review

With lots of natural light streaming in the big front windows of the downtown Ann Arbor District Library on a Sunday afternoon, the young at heart of all ages enjoyed the Paul Keller Quintet's jazz arrangements from the World of The Wizard of Oz. It was a wonderful chance for anyone to listen to excellent jazz musicians, at no charge, play well-known tunes for eager listeners. Our public library has offered these concerts for many years and Paul Keller has joyfully presented several of them. He arranges the tunes so all are involved and plays his bass with a smile on every tune.

Opening with "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," Sarah D'Angelo's soaring voice filled the lobby, along with Keller, Ralph Tope on guitar, Adam Mosley on electric piano, and Cary Kocher on vibraphone and a few vocals. We all became young again, hearing these lively renditions of "Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are," "Ding Dong, the Wicked Witch is Dead," "Follow the Yellow Brick Road," with Tope and Kocher serving up some great swing in the library lobby! Cary Kocher brought a smile to many with his droll rendition of "If I Were the King of the Forest." What a fun way to kick off the holiday season with many happy residents.

Happenings at Area Venues in January

BY LARS BJORN

The Blue LLama in Ann Arbor and Cliff Bells in Detroit are again the central venues in January.

The LLama features the exciting Don Was and the Pan-Detroit Ensemble on January 9 and 10, and the creative drummer Jonathan Taylor and his quartet play on January 15. Pianist Rick Roe will be on tap for the WEMU 5:01 Jazz Series on January 16, and the next day singer Shahida Nurullah and Good Company will be on stage. Nurullah is a veteran Detroit musician who is always impressive. Another Detroiter drummer Gayelynn McKinney and her Ona ensemble appear on January 23. Japanese pianist Aya Sekine, who recently relocated to Detroit, comes to the LLama on January 29 with her trio. Her genre-bending approach will appeal to many.

Cliff Bells will present trumpeter Trunino Lowe and his quintet January 2–4. One of his mentors, the great bassist Rodney Whitaker, will be part of the group. Trumpeter Allen Dennard will display his chops January 16–18, and bassist Jonathon Muir-Cotton — who was mentored by Whitaker — is on stage January 23–25.

Piotr's birthday bash

SEMJA's Piotr Michalowski will be celebrating his birthday on Thursday, January 8 (a day ahead ...) with a gig at Ziggy's, 206 Michigan Ave. in Ypsilanti. Doors open at 7:30; the first set at 8:00 p.m. will consist of a duet: his saxophones and clarinets in tandem with Jonathan Baharal Taylor's drums and percussion. On the second set they will be joined by Ken Kozora, horns, etc., Deanna Relyea, voice, Kenn Thomas, piano, and Shoshke-Razyl Runi, guitar. Door charge is voluntary.

jazz events
January

			1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

ATTENTION all venue owners, musicians, and listeners
Please let us know about upcoming jazz events in the area!

- Write us at SEMJA
  3020 Bolgos Circle
  Ann Arbor MI 48105
- Phone us at 734-668-7470
- Submit information online at *www.semja.org/submit*

We will include notices if they reach us by the 15th of the month prior to publication.

Aretha's Jazz Café at Music Hall

jazzcafedetroit.com
350 Madison
DETROIT 313-887-8500

JANUARY

8	7:00	Kiko: Anita Baker Tribute
9	7:00	Skyelea Trio
30	7:00	The Cookers

ONGOING

Sun	7:00	Aretha's Jazz Jam

Baker's Keyboard Lounge

theofficialbakerskeyboardlounge.com
20510 Livernois
DETROIT 313-345-6300

ONGOING

Fri	7:00	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams
Sat	7:00	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams

Blue LLama Jazz Club

bluellamaclub.com
314 South Main St.
ANN ARBOR 734-372-3200

JANUARY

7	7:00	Arnold / Jassi / Kramer: World Transcendence
8	7:00	Signal Quartet
9 10	6:30	Don Was and the Pan-Detroit Ensemble
11	6:00	The Triumvirate
14	7:00	Alain Sullivan's SoulHeart Collective
15	7:00	Jonathon Barahal Taylor Quartet
16	4:00	WEMU 5:01 Jazz Series: Rick Roe
16	7:00	Shahida Nurullah & Good Company
17	6:30	Sean Dobbins Organ Trio
18	6:00	Sarah D'Angelo & Cliff Monear
21	7:00	Tumbao Bravo
22	7:00	Max Bowen Quartet
23	7:00	Ona – featuring Gayelynn McKinney, Laura-Simone & Redwood
24	7:00	Nick Collins Sextet
25	5:30	Hamilton de Holanda
28	7:00	Elvin Sharp Quartet
29	7:00	Aya Sekine Trio
30	4:00	Kerrytown Stompers
30	7:00	Dwight Adams Quartet
31	7:00	Russ Macklem Detroit Quintet

Cadieux Café

cadieuxcafe.com
4300 Cadieux Rd.
DETROIT 313-882-8560

ONGOING

Thu	8:00	Bill Meyer Group – with Ibrahim Jones, Butter Hawkins

Cliff Bells

cliffbells.com
2030 Park Ave at West Adams
DETROIT 313-961-2543

JANUARY

2, 3	7:30 9:30	Trunino Lowe Quintet – featuring Rodney Whitaker
4	5:30 7:30	Trunino Lowe Quintet – featuring Rodney Whitaker
8	7:30 9:30	Alise King
9	7:30 9:30	The Detroit Jazz Project
10	7:30 9:30	Gwenyth Hayes
11	5:30 7:30	Mason Bays
15	7:30 9:30	Everything Yes
16, 17	7:30 9:30	Allen Dennard
18	5:30 7:30	Allen Dennard
22–24	7:30 9:30	Jonathon Muir-Cotton
25	5:30	Jonathon Muir-Cotton
25	8:00	Bill Laurance (Solo Piano)
29	7:30 9:30	Langston Kitchen's Mahogany Collective
30, 31	7:30 9:30	Hearts and Mind

ONGOING

Wed	7:30 9:30	Jauron Perry and Session

Common Grill

commongrill.com
112 South Main St.
CHELSEA (734) 475-0470

ONGOING

Tue	5:00	Rob Crozier Trio

Dirty Dog Jazz Café

dirtydogjazz.com
97 Kercheval
GROSSE PTE. FARMS 313-882-5299

JANUARY

8	6:00	Trunino Lowe
9, 10	6:30	Trunino Lowe
15	6:00	Ali Bey
16, 17	6:30	Ali Bey
22	6:00	Sean Dobbins
23, 24	6:30	Sean Dobbins
29	6:00	Mason Beys
30, 31	6:30	Mason Beys

ONGOING

Wed	6:30	Michael Zaporski

The Earle

theearle.com
121 West Washington St.
ANN ARBOR 734-994-0211

ONGOING

Tue	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Wed	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Thu	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Fri	7:00	Jazz Trio
Sat	7:00	Jazz Trio

Elks Lodge #325
110 West Ann Arbor Trail
PLYMOUTH

ONGOING

Sat	6:00	Open Jam Session – with Pete Siers, Kenji Lee, Andy Peck, Max Bowen

Imaginate Restaurant
imaginaterestaurant.com
401 South Lafayette Ave.
ROYAL OAK 248-633-8899

ONGOING

Wed	6:30	Eat It Up Trio

Eat It Up Trio

Kerrytown Concert House
kerrytownconcerthouse.com
415 North Fourth Ave.
ANN ARBOR 734-769-2999

JANUARY

23	7:00	Third Coast Swing – featuring Grant Flick

London Chop House
155 West Congress St.
DETROIT

ONGOING

Thu	7:30	Paul Keller, Paul King, Ralph Tope, Adam Mosley

Paul Keller

Lucille's Jazz Lounge
lucillesjazzlounge.com
1447 North Summit St., Suite C
TOLEDO, OH

JANUARY

9	8:00	Sisters of Thunder

Shield's
25101 Telegraph Rd.
SOUTHFIELD

JANUARY

10	1:00	Ramona Collins
24	1:00	Olivia Van Goor with the Eat It Up Trio

Ramona Collins

Venue by 4M
experience4m.com
1919 South Industrial Hwy.
ANN ARBOR 734-800-0128

ONGOING

Sun	11 am	Jazz Sunday Brunch
Sat	7:00	Saturday Night Jazz

Weber's Habitat Lounge
thehabitatannarbor.com
3050 Jackson Rd.
ANN ARBOR 734-665-3636

ONGOING

Mon	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Tue	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Wed	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Thu	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Sun	5:00	William Marshall Bennett

William Marshall Bennett

Phil Ogilvie's Rhythm Kings

Zal Gaz Grotto
zalgaz.org
2070 West Stadium Blvd.
ANN ARBOR 734-663-1202

ONGOING

Sun	5:00	Phil Ogilvie's Rhythm Kings
Mon	7:00	Paul Keller Orchestra
Tue	5:30	Paul Klinger's Easy Street Jazz Band

Ziggy's
ziggysypsistore.com
206 West Michigan Ave.
YPSILANTI

JANUARY

8	7:30	Piotr's Birthday Bash

Upcoming Jazz Events

FEBRUARY

5–7	Cliff Bells 20th Anniversary • Detroit
5–7	Planet D Nonet • Dirty Dog Café, Grosse Pointe Farms
6	Wynton Marsalis Symphony No. 4 • Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor
6–8	Marsalis's Swing Symphony – with Paradise Theatre Big Band • Orchestra Hall, Detroit
6–8	Caleb Wheeler Curtis • Orchestra Hall, Detroit
7	Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis • Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor
12–14	The GUD Band • Dirty Dog Café, Grosse Pointe Farms
12	Canja de Boa • Cliff Bells, Detroit
13	Easy Street Jazz Band • Cliff Bells, Detroit
13	Mr. B's Annual Birthday Bounce • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor
14	Sheila Fleming • Lucille's, Toledo
14	Craig Strain Orchestra • Shield's, Southfield
15	Terence Blanchard and Ravi Coltrane: Miles Davis and John Coltrane Centennial • Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor
15	Kimmie Horne • Cliff Bells, Detroit
19	Ariel Kasler Quartet • Lucille's, Toledo
20	The Quick Trio • Lucille's, Toledo
21	Tiffany Gridiron • Lucille's, Toledo
28	James Dapogny's Chicago Jazz Band • Shield's, Southfield
28	Eastern Boundary Quartet • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor

MARCH

1	**SEMJA Presents Ron Brooks Award to Lars Bjorn • Kerrytown Concert House**

3020 Bolgos Circle
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 240
Ann Arbor, MI

Membership

Renew

Sally Bolle
Greater Detroit Jazz Society

The Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association

(SEMJA) was formed in 1987 for the purpose of promoting understanding and appreciation of jazz as an art form. The organization is comprised of professional musicians, jazz scholars, jazz writers, club owners, broadcasters and listeners. The organization operates through a Board and with a volunteer staff.

SEMJA is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

Inquiries

All mail should be sent to SEMJA,
3020 Bolgos Circle,
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
For phone messages
call: 734.668.7470
email: *semja@semja.org*

Publication

The *SEMJA Update* is published monthly and sent to members at no cost. It is edited by Lars Bjorn and Piotr Michalowski with additional assistance from Barton Polot (production editor), Margot Campos (layout), and Jeff Gaynor.

SEMJA online

website: *www.semja.org*
social: *facebook.com/semja.org*

SEMJA Board Meeting

The SEMJA Board meets normally on the third Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. The meeting on January 20 will be held online via video conferencing (Zoom). Please call Lars at 734-353-3568 if you have questions.

Board Members

Lars Bjorn, *President*
Piotr Michalowski, *Vice-president*
Jeff Gaynor, *Secretary, Treasurer*
Barton Polot, *Webmaster and Managing Editor*
Ron Brooks, *President Emeritus*

Ira Lax
Kenji Lee
Ingrid Racine
Ellen Rowe
Sandy Schopbach
Linda Yohn

SEMJA Membership Application

Mail to: SEMJA • 3020 Bolgos Circle.
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

❑ New Member
❑ Renewal

Membership Levels

❑ Basic	$30
❑ Student	$20
❑ Couple	$40
❑ Patron	$60
❑ Nonprofit Corp.	$50
❑ Corporate	$250
❑ Lifetime	$500

Amount Enclosed $_____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

❑ Check payable to **SEMJA** ❑ Credit Card |___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|

Exp. |___|___| / |___|___| CVV |___|___|___|